

## PREFACE

After my retirement from an active teaching and nursing career my family asked me to jot down my recollection of my past. So it is without any intention of attracting public notice, but, rather, as a legacy to my family that I am writing my memoirs, addressing my own people to whom I can speak with the utmost freedom, feeling that even trivial incidents may not be destitute of interest to them.

## INTRODUCTION

In June of 1982, at the age of seventy-eight years, Mary Lyons, after a career which included eleven years of country school-teaching, almost forty years of active nursing and eight years of 'active' retirement gave up keeping her own home and moved to a retirement home. Her chief project at this time was to write her memoirs. Once begun she found the project greater than expected, and she spent a great deal of time working on it. At the same time she continued to live an extremely active social life, in spite of the fact that she had in the previous five years suffered at least three heart attacks and, early in 1982, a stroke. In late November, 1982 she was stricken with pneumonia and another apparent stroke. She died on December 21, 1982. Her memoirs were far from completed; but she leaves to her family the legacy of her own life as shared with them. She was the last of her generation in the immediate family.

"Here! You can throw this out the back door; it is the mother we have to save!" These were the doctor's words to the nurse who attended my mother at the time of my birth. Because she was eclamptic Dr. Hamilton, the family physician, declared that my mother must go where she would be near a doctor at all times. Since Dr. Hamilton practised nine miles away it was decided that my mother should stay at her parents' home in Orangeville where she would have Dr. Henry to deliver her. After a thorough examination it was decided that the pregnancy should be terminated after the seventh month in order to save her life.\* Small wonder it was that when Dr. Henry saw the scrawny infant weighing only two and a half pounds he felt it unlikely that such a tiny piece of humanity could be saved. However, my Grandmother Mercer, who had had experience as a practical nurse, took on the responsibility of my care. She placed me in a cradle with sealers of hot water around the mattress, and it was said that whenever those sealers became cool I became limp. A warm sugar solution, to which a few drops of whiskey had been added, was administered to me by eye dropper. Later my mother's milk was given to me from a teaspoon.

Mother recovered slowly from her confinement, but, because I depended on her milk and was still too frail to travel, she had to remain in Orangeville until I was about three months old. When it was decided that I was strong enough to travel by train Mother wrote to my father telling him what day to expect her and the baby home. However, as the letter had not arrived by that day no one was at the Cheltenham Station to meet us.\*\* A family friend, Sandy Sinclair, said that he would take us home, jokingly making it a condition that Mother should give him the baby in return! This jest plagued me for the first five years of my life, for every time Mr. Sinclair saw me he claimed me as his daughter and cuddled me on his knee. When I was told that my tormentor was going to move out West I went dancing about the house chanting: "Hooray! Hooray! Sandy Sinclair is going West!"

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\* This was her fifth pregnancy, and she would have been at this time forty-four years old.

\*\* As Mary was born September 30, this journey must have been made in late December or early January.

If the story of my life is to be truly told it must include some history of previous generations of my family and accounts of friends, to all of whom I owe so much for making my whole life such a happy and worthwhile experience.

I think that I owe to my father's family my sense of integrity and duty, for they were hard-working and dedicated people. My great-grandparents, James and Elizabeth (Hewson) Lyons came to Ontario from Northern Ireland in 1835 and settled on Crown Land on Lot 23, Township of Chinguacousy, County of Peel which is the N.E. corner of the Fourth Line and Twenty-two Sideroad. At this time their six children ranged in age from thirteen to twenty-eight years.

I believe two of the older boys (one of whom was my grandfather) who, like their father, had been linen-weavers in Ireland, came to Canada a few years later than their parents.\*\* They settled on Lot 24, next to their father and proceeded to build a house and clear land. In those days they had to fell trees and saw logs by hand. They used oxen to grub out stumps and brush and to plough the land. My grandfather used to pack flour and other necessities on his back from Streetsville, about fifteen miles south of his home. He carried logging chains, and, on one occasion, a sugar kettle on his back! Before coming home he always stopped at the hotel for a meal, and it was here that he met my grandmother, then Ann (Hamilton) Lundy, the hotel-keeper's widowed daughter.\*\*\* My grandparents had five children, Elizabeth (Lizzie), William George (Will or W.G.), my father, Hamilton, Annie and Albert.\*\*\*\*

Lizzie married Will Henry, and they had four daughters, Ethel, Bertha, Mae and Annie. The two older girls, who were close to my sister Wilma in age, were often at our home, especially if there were any dances in the offing, in which case my brother George, who had a six-seater bob-sleigh and two light horses, was appointed to take the Henry girls along with two other cousins, Isa and Edith Lyons (daughters of Uncle Hamilton Lyons) and Wilma to the dance.

Uncle Hamilton married Isadore Cook, who died when their first baby, named Isadore after her mother, was born. My mother, whose first baby, Wilhelmine (Wilma) was about a year old at this time, took Isa and looked after the two babies until ~~until~~ Ham remarried within the year. He and his second wife (nee Annie Clark) had three children, Edith, Harold and Clarence. Uncle Ham farmed his father's home farm. His grandson John Lyons now farms this land.

Aunt Annie married Josiah Townsend, a miller, and had one son, George, who took over his father's mill in Cheltenham. Aunt Annie and Uncle Josiah were my favourite relatives. Even at an early age I was conscious of their always doing something for someone else. Because Aunt Annie felt that George might grow up to be selfish she made a practice of having a boy or girl from the Barnardo Home in England. These children were always encouraged to develop their talents, and many became successful men and women.\*\*\*\*\* Aunt Annie and Uncle Josiah also adopted twins, Harry and Adelaide. Harry became a teacher, but died of a heart attack while young. Adelaide married a Mr. Thompson from Milton where I renewed our relationship through our common membership in Knox Presbyterian W.M.S. I particularly remember Adelaide in a beautiful blue dress pouring tea at a W.M.S. meeting, and I thought how proud Aunt Annie would have been to have seen her.

Aunt Annie was also a talented musician. Two special favourites were "Nearer My God To Thee" and "Listen to the Mocking Bird" - with variations, of course! She kept the piano in the kitchen where she could move from culinary activities to the piano with ease. Her repertoire was eclectic; one popular piece of the day was "They're Wearing Them Higher in Hawaii", and she rattled this off as well! When I started

\* Now Mississauga Road and Old School Road

\*\* Mary's grandfather was George Lyons, b. 1807 or 1808.

\*\*\* In one version of her memoirs Mary speaks of the hotel as being in Meadowville, but older members of the family are sure that it was in Streetsville.

\*\*\*\* Mary states that her grandfather was over fifty when he married, but records of birthdates indicate that he was about 48 years old when Mary's father, his second child, was born. Albert was commonly called "Art".

\*\*\*\*\* SEE bottom following page

High School Aunt Annie dropped a ten dollar bill into my purse, saying that I should buy something new to wear or whatever I specially needed.

Uncle Art married Mary Anne Fuller. They farmed the two hundred acres immediately north of ours, and their daughter Pearl and I spent many happy hours playing together as we could run across the fields to each other's home. Aunt Mary Anne also walked over the fields to have a cup of tea and a gossip on occasion. Their son, Joey, died of a ruptured appendix when he was about twelve years of age.

I recall an incident which seems amusing now, but which, no doubt, failed to inspire much mirth in the chief participants at the time. As Uncle Art's farm was just north of ours, but with the house on the Fourth Line, he and his family used to come through our property via the 'back lane' each Sunday on their way to Union Church. They had a vehicle known as a Gladstone in which Uncle Art and Joey sat in the front driving seat while Aunt Mary Anne and Pearl sat in the back facing backward. One Sunday as they were starting down the Fifth Line below our gate the horses gave a lunge forward, pitching the ladies out the back!

My mother was Georgina Mercer. Most of the history of the Mercer lineage I must write from what my mother told me. She told of how her paternal grandmother, the daughter of a lawyer in Scotland, fell in love with their young Irish coachman. They eloped to Upper Canada and settled on one hundred acres at Connor, Ontario. They had four boys and two girls, the youngest of the children being born shortly after the untimely death of the young husband. Great-grandmother Mercer reared the children alone. One of the boys, Robert, remained on the farm. Great-grandmother, knowing that she could not afford to educate the other boys to any profession, made sure that they learned good trades. One became a stone-mason of great distinction; one, James, became a miller in Tottenham; one, Thomas L., became a saddler, taking his training at the old Barnhill store in Norval.\* Thomas married Susannah Lake and, in the course of time, became my grandfather! Thomas and Susannah Mercer had five children, Georgina Anna (my mother), Mary Syrena, John Byron (Jack), Sheridan Frederick (Fred), and Frank Anderson.\*\*

My mother was a tom-boy and loved to ride horseback. She told of how she and Uncle Jack tried to take a stone fence when the horse reared up and threw her onto the stones. Her only injury was that part of her ear was badly torn. Uncle Jack went to a neighbour's house where, with borrowed white cotton thread and sewing needle, he stitched her up! Because she feared that she was in grave trouble, Mother did not flinch. You see, it was Sunday, and riding on the Lord's day was prohibited! Later Mother became a pianist and taught piano in the Cheltenham area. She also taught music two days a week at her great-grandmother Frank's house at Greenlaw.\*\*\* She became the first organist when the new Presbyterian church was built in Cheltenham.

Before my mother would agree to marry my father she told him that he must have a profession. So he chose to become a veterinary. While at college in Toronto he roomed with his cousin who was studying Medicine. When he completed his studies, however, he received word of a bequest from an uncle in Ireland. So he went to the old country to collect the money, and on his return he put it into one hundred acres of land, the east half of lot 24, concession 5 which, together with the west half of lot 24 already owned by his father, made a single 200-acre lot. Father did not practise his profession (except for himself or as an unpaid favour, perhaps) but instead started raising pure-bred stock. My mother, therefore, as his help-mate turned her hand to farming and milked a herd of eleven Jersey cows, making butter

\*\*\*\*\* In the late 1970's Nora Winterflood had for about 4 years a regular correspondence with one of Aunt Annie's "boys", Frank Bertram. He remembered the Towns-

\* ends with deep and grateful affection.  
Jean and Wilfred Kirkwood, who operated a hardware business for a number of years on the Barnhill property were able to tell us that a leather-working trade had been carried on on the upper floor at one time.

\*\* Georgina Mercer was born September 17, 1859.

\*\*\* We believe that the Franks were the parents of Susannah (Lake) Mercer's mother.



in the stone buttery on the farm and taking it to the train in Cheltenham for shipment to Toronto.

In the meantime, my father entered local politics and spent much time at council meetings and other municipal functions. A favourite saying of my father, when leaving for these activities was: "Well, I'm away!"; and "away" he was from about 9:00 A.M. until 6:00 P.M.! Needless to say, Mother kept the home-fires burning.

After her marriage to Alfred Dawson Aunt Mary moved to New Mexico where her husband was engaged in silver mining. She died when her second child was born, leaving an older child, Rita. \*

Uncle Jack Mercer became a druggist and practised this profession as a member of the North West Mounted Police while stationed at Battleford, Saskatchewan. This was at the time of the Riel Rebellion; so they were in combat with the Metis.\*\* After this time he took up residence in S. Battleford, and in my travels I found the home where he had lived and kept his dispensary. He married Susan Wallace. I met a woman over one hundred years old who told me that when Uncle Jack came down East to marry he and his bride had to travel by way of St. Louis, and Uncle Jack bought a hat for her little daughter on his way back.

Uncle Jack and Aunt Susan had two daughters, Gretna and Nesta, named after the last places they had passed through coming West, and one son, Herbert. Gretna grew up to be a charming young lady, but Nesta seemed to have a chip on her shoulder and so tended to be unpopular. Herbert was the apple of his father's eye, and Uncle Jack had hopes that he would take over the wholesale liquor business which he had by this time established in Edmonton. This business thrived, and Uncle Jack built a large warehouse, known as the Mercer Building, which still stands across from the C.N.R. Station in N. Edmonton, currently housing a wholesale fabric business.

Uncle Jack developed a heart problem, and, on his doctor's recommendation, he moved to Hawaii, leaving his brother Frank in charge of the liquor business until such time as Herbert, who was only ten years old, could take over. However, changes in liquor laws and the institution of government control made a private business such as he operated no longer viable. When he died in 1913 Uncle Jack did not know that his fortune had crumbled. Such estate as he had he left to his second wife, Jennie, and the two children of this second marriage, Miriam and John.

Uncle Fred Mercer was a dentist, and for a time he practised in Acton, Ontario. While I was training at Guelph General Hospital I noticed that an elderly patient had a particularly well-made set of dentures. When I remarked upon this she informed me that they had been made by a young dentist named Dr. Fred. Mercer who had come to practise in Acton many years before! While in Acton Uncle Fred married Jessie Nickland who had been reared by her uncle, Mr. Story, the operator of a glove factory in Acton.\*\*\* They left Acton and went to Silver City, New Mexico, where Aunt Mary and Uncle Alfred lived. After a short time, however, they went to Chicago where Uncle Fred took a graduate course in denture-making. From Chicago they moved on

- \* The baby died also. Rita was about eight years old at the time. As a child she took ballet lessons and picture of her in costume was still around the old family home in the 1930's, as was also a pink tutu which had been hers.
- \*\* The Riel Rebellion was in 1885, which would make Jack Mercer about 22 years of age. We believe that he was actually in charge of drug supplies.
- \*\*\* Mr. Story's home was the fine old house which is now operated as the Funeral Home on the north side of #7 Hwy. in Acton.

to Edmonton where Uncle Fred set up in private practice and later taught plate-making at the School of Dentistry, University of Alberta.

Their elder daughter, Mary, born October 24, 1908, taught in Alberta for a number of years before moving to the parish of East Baton Rouge in Louisiana where she completed her master's degree in Education. In 1946 she married Wolfgang Borne, a professor of art. After her husband died in 1949 Mary moved to New Jersey where she taught art. In 1966 she returned to Edmonton where she taught in the P.W. Wagner School for a number of years. She passed away in 1981.

Their younger daughter, Jessie, who was several years younger than Mary, studied piano at the Toronto Conservatory of Music in the 1930's. \*\* Jessie, a tall, attractive and delightful girl was also very athletic with a special aptitude for swimming. She later taught piano and performed on radio in Edmonton before her marriage to Ivan Kirkby. The Kirkby's had three daughters: Barbara, a public health nurse, is married to a brilliant Peruvian research veterinarian named Manuel Carpio; \*\*\* Marjorie is also a nurse; and Charlotte is at University.

My mother's youngest brother, Frank, became a jeweller in Treherm, Manitoba, where he met and married Kate Greene, daughter of a well-to-do farmer. When his brother Jack became unwell Uncle Frank moved to Edmonton to assume the management of Uncle Jack's business. Whether the liquor Uncle Frank had been in the habit of consuming in Treherm, or whether the convenient access to this commodity in his new position was irresistible, the fact is that he imbibed rather copious amounts of it, enhancing his regular practice by going on periodic 'toots'. As I remember them Uncle Frank and Aunt Kate were an affectionate couple, Aunt Kate combining strength of character with tolerance and a lively sense of humour. After Uncle Jack's business folded, Uncle Frank operated his own watch and clock repair business in Edmonton until his death from a strangulated hernia in the late 1940's or early 1950's.

Now to get back to the baby who survived against all odds! As I had not walked by the age of over eighteen months my mother contacted Dr. Henry, and his advice was to put me out on the bare grass. Evidently it was sound advice as I was walking by my second birthday.

Music played a large part in my early life. Mother had been a music teacher, and my sister, Wilma, who was seventeen years older than I, was studying for her Conservatory of Music credits. I can remember being carried into the drawing-room and placed on the love-seat where I listened to her practise.

Father and Mother always did a lot of entertaining. Father, who was three times Warden of Peel County, had many associates and friends who were councillors; so Mother, who was a charming hostess as well as a good cook, served many meals in the line of duty. On Sunday afternoons there were always young friends visiting Wilma, George and Mer. When the weather permitted tea, as it was then called, was served on the lawn. Afterward all gathered in the drawing room for music. As she knew most hymns and popular songs by heart, Mother usually played for a sing-song. Harry Hodgson, an English gentleman who worked for the family, and who had been a paid soloist in an Anglican church in Hull, England, was always included in the group.

During the long winter evenings acquaintances frequently dropped in. Card games for the men and chatting for the ladies were the usual forms of entertainment. The men also discussed politics, and as my father was a Liberal Sir Wilfréd Laurier stood high in his esteem. (In fact, my oldest brother, George, was named George

\*We are indebted to Norah Edwards for this information.

\*\* Now the Royal Conservatory of Toronto.

\*\*\* In 1984 Barbara began teaching at McMaster University; her husband is Manager of Technology Transfer for Connaught Labs. and travels to many continents in this capacity. Charlotte is teaching English in Korea.

Wilfred after Laurier.) As there were no lights for travelling after dark these visitors frequently stayed the night. It seemed to my young mind that life was a continuous round of company.

My mother was very methodical about her day-to-day duties. She always washed on Monday, even if the clothes had to lie in rinse-water until the weather was suitable for hanging them out. Ironing was done on Tuesday, and it was an all-day job with linen bedding and men's shirts being ironed by hand with sad irons which were heated on the wood stove. Meetings were traditionally held on Wednesday; so this day was reserved for that purpose. Thursday afternoons were spent receiving guests. A green pottery dish held the calling cards which people left when they dropped in. Tea was served. Friday was cleaning day, and with sixteen rooms - and no electrical appliances - this was quite a chore. Saturday was baking day with as many goodies being prepared for the following week as could be baked and stored. Of course, with a family of seven and two or three hired men there was always extra baking each week day.

Mother and Father were always very conscious of the importance of cultural and educational activities. They both insisted on the use of correct grammar, and we were encouraged to consult the dictionary for correct use of words. At five years of age I could find any city on the map of Canada which hung on the kitchen wall. Among my earliest recollections is standing on a chair to recite.

Mother and Wilma occasionally went to Toronto by train to hear operas, the Mendelssohn Choir and, on one occasion, Jan Ignace Paderewski, whose Minuet Wilma herself performed very beautifully. I recall, also, that Fred and Wilma once went to Toronto to hear Sir Harry Lauder.

After my grandmother Mercer died (a year after I was born) Grandfather Mercer always came from Orangeville to spend his holidays with us.\*\* He came by train, changing at Inglewood to take the Hamilton line which brought him into Terra Cotta. He always brought a large bouquet of carnations or giant mums which he bought at Parson's Greenhouse in Orangeville. These flowers fostered in me a love for bouquets which I have always cherished.

It was Grandpa Mercer also who taught us to be genteel in manners. Many years later, while traveling 'home' from the West, I met a professional man who came from Orangeville. When I told him that Orangeville was my birthplace and the home of my grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. T. L. Mercer, he said: "I knew T. L. Mercer well; he was the most mannerly person I ever knew."

On one of Grandpa Mercer's visits we watched Halley's Comet. To see this bright object with its trailing light was fascinating. Grandfather told me that no one ever saw Halley's Comet twice. Now that it is slated to appear in 1984 I am wondering whether I shall be permitted to see it twice.\*\*\*

Grandfather had a heart condition, and in November, 1909, while spending a few weeks with us, he passed away in his sleep. This was my first experience of death, and, while I was not truly aware of all the implications of death, I was conscious of the loss to all of us.

\* A box of these cards is preserved and in Georgina Dolson's possession.

\*\* Susannah (Lake) Mercer died July 17, 1904, aged 66 years, 9 months; she was born Oct. 10, 1837.

\*\*\* As Mary died in 1982 her grandfather's pronouncement proved prophetic.

EARLY TIMES

Originally, our house had a basement kitchen. When meals were to be served in the dining room the food was taken up in a dumb waiter. My brother Fred and his cousin George found another use for this contraption; they used to pull each other up in it! Hot and cold water were pumped from the steam engine in the buttery. There was also a furnace in the house which was fired with four-foot cord-wood.

In the summer of 1905 a large addition was built on the back part of the house. This consisted of a large kitchen and a sitting room on the ground floor and two bedrooms and a bathroom on the second floor. So the cellar kitchen was eliminated. My parents felt that this new arrangement would facilitate dividing the house to accomodate a married son and his family in the future.

The bath-room water supply was fed by gravity from a tank in the attic which, in turn, had to be filled by hand-pumping water from a large cistern. A hot water tank in the bath-room was heated directly from the kitchen stove which stood directly beneath the tank with a circulating pipe connecting the two. Occasionally Father forgot to damper down the stove before retiring to bed, and we would be awakened by the sound of steam bubbling in the tank. Then all the hot water taps had to be opened to let off the pressure! On cold mornings we also used to warm out clothes around this tank before getting dressed.

With the addition the house now had twelve large rooms and four large hallways. The house was heated by a cellar furnace and three main floor wood stoves. Stove-pipes went through some of the bedrooms, and these pipes had to be cleaned regularly. The chimneys were cleaned by setting fire to straw in them. I thought it great excitement to hear the roar of the blazing chimney!

The Jersey herd grew to forty head, milked, of course, by hand. A stationary steam engine ran the separator and butter churn. Mother worked the butter by hand, forming it into one-pound prints. The butter was chilled in a large ice refrigerator, and twice a week Mother took the butter, packed in butter boxes, in the buckboard to Norval Station to be shipped to Mickey Bros. in Toronto. Later we started to ship sour cream to the City Dairy in Toronto.\* Mr. Andrew MacDonald and my father took turns hauling the cans to Terra Cotta Station. They always took me along, and I loved to see the big locomotive as it rounded the bend coming in to the station. Mr. MacDonald always gave me a penny to buy candy at the little store run by Barbara Jane Smith.

I soon learned that life on a farm was a round of duties. Spring brought harrowing, rolling and seeding, as well as the planting of a garden. Mother encouraged me to plant my own little garden as well.

Midsummer was haying time, and it was hot work building the loads onto the wagons with pitch forks. The hay was unloaded with a huge 'fork' on a rope and pulley system, pulled by a horse which, in turn, was led by a man. This pulled the bundles up and into the barn where the fork was 'tripped', dropping the bundle into the mow where, once more, it had to be properly distributed by hand with pitch forks. Haying was followed by grain harvesting, the grain being harvested in order of ripening - fall wheat, followed by barley, then oats. Grain was cut and bound into sheaves with a binder, then stooked by hand to dry before threshing. The rows of stooks were a beautiful sight. Threshing machines separated the grain from the chaff. My brother Mercer became a professional thresher travelling over a wide territory to perform this important agricultural service.

Finally, after the first frost, came the harvesting of corn - 'corn-cutting', as it was called. The corn was blown into silos, much the same as today. Threshing

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\* This is recorded as Mary wrote, although it seems questionable.



and corn-cutting were communal activities, with men from neighbouring farms working together. The women prepared huge meals, sometimes for as many as sixteen men. Large roasts, potatoes, two other vegetables, pickles and chili sauce, pies, cakes, tarts and biscuits and apple sauce or canned fruit were served. The garden also had to be harvested before frost. Root crops were stored in a root cellar, and apples, packed in barrels, were stored in the cellar.

Winter was the season for cutting wood. In winter we burned coal in the cook-stove, but the furnace used four-foot cord-wood, the smaller stoves, shorter pieces.\* I recall a ginger house-cat who made a habit of parking on the damper of the furnace; her fur was always singed on the side facing the heat! The wood was supplied from the bush on our own land. Winter was also the time to lay in a supply of ice. The men cut the ice on the Credit River in Glen Williams, and it was hauled home on sleighs to be stored, packed in sawdust, in a large ice-house which was part of the buttery complex building.

As I was the youngest in the family Mother decided that I should have a dog as a companion. She acquired two fox terriers, Jerry for me and Bolger for my brothers George and Mer, who were just a year apart in ages, and ten and eleven years older than I. These terriers kept our place and Jime McKane's farm, next to ours, free of groundhogs. Jerry, the smaller, would go down the hole, chasing the groundhog out its back door where Bolger would be waiting to pounce on the unfortunate creature and break its neck.

Because there was no one for me to play with Mother felt that I was lonely. Fred, five and a half years older than I, was very protective of me, but he could scarcely be expected to play little-girl games with me. On week-ends our cousin, George Townsend, who was Fred's bosom friend, came to play with him, ball being a favourite game with them. Happily for me, a close friend of my parents, Jack Murray, was at this time selling out, and Mother and Dad bought from him a lawn swing and a charming play-house. This play-house had two windows with sliding sash and little glass panes, a door with glass panes, and hard-wood flooring. Mother built a little cupboard for my dishes, and I had a kindergarten table with four chairs. She also made curtains for the windows. Wilma and Norma Hunter, my school chums from up the road, came on Saturdays to play in the play-house. We used to decorate our little home with wild flowers of the season, but on one occasion we caused my mother much concern by electing to use most of the blossoms from her only cherry tree as our decorating material! The bond between the Hunter girls and me began with these happy times, and to this day we remain the closest of friends.

One of the things that especially delighted me was dressing up in my sister Wilma's clothes. I was particularly fond of a large pink hat with wings on it. So Mother remodeled it into a poke bonnet for me. As a pre-schooler I often ran down to the school which was about half a mile south of us. One day I 'prettied up' my coin-dotted dress by painting extra dots in red and green using Wilma's oil paints. Pleased with my creative effort I scampered down to the school-house and slipped into my cousin Clarence Lyons's seat. As it happened, this was the day that the photographer was coming to take the annual school pictures; so I got into the picture! Seeing what I had done to my dress Fred looked very glum in the photograph!

I recall another story of an early experience. After I had first begun exploring out of doors my mother was concerned because I frequently fell asleep. I myself can remember once falling over asleep while standing beside the cellar door. One day Mother found me in the poppy bed with some poppy seeds which I had collected in my apron pocket. The mystery was explained, and the poppy bed was done away with!

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\* The coal bin opened directly off the old cellar kitchen.



While attending Bryn Mawr Ladies College in Toronto Uncle Jack's daughter, Gretna, spent each Thanksgiving and Easter holiday with us. As she always brought me two large bows for my hair, I looked forward to these visits with special interest. Uncle Jack always spent a few days with us when he came east to buy liquor for his wholesale business in Edmonton, and in 1907 Wilma went west <sup>to visit</sup> with him and his family. While Wilma was away I asked my mother for a birthday cake for my fifth birthday on September 30th. Mother said, "I'll teach you how to make a cake for yourself. I shall never forget the thrill of that first layer cake; and my mother, who never lost any opportunity to teach me responsibilities, said that I should have the special privilege of making a layer cake every Saturday. No doubt this is why a few years later I won first prize over three hundred contestants for a layer cake.

My mother also taught me to sew at an early age. I particularly recall making a pinafore for which I learned to make a fell\* seam, to hem, and to sew on eyelet embroidery. She also taught me to crochet, sew on lace, do feather stitch, chain-stitch, hemstitch, and to darn, all of which I learned to do well and found useful throughout life.

One relative who holds an important place in my memory is Elizabeth Mercer, a cousin of my mother, who came for two weeks every summer and winter to do sewing for Mother, Wilma and me. Elizabeth could make the pattern and fit the cloth herself, and during her stay the sewing machine never stopped as long as there was daylight! I loved her especially because she always took time to make dresses for my dolls.

When a little older I was given responsibility each week for washing the bathroom fixtures and floor as well as the back stairs. In addition, I was responsible for washing the table and chairs on the back porch as well as washing the cement porch floor and the walkways around the terrace. Always, when I had finished Mother would remind me that the tasks were my special responsibilities.

When King Edward VII died I recall that my mother wept. I could not understand why the loss of someone so far away could upset her so much; so she explained to me that he was the King of England and Canada and required our loyalty. Experiencing her commitment inspired in me a loyalty to the monarchy which I have cherished ever since. I recall, also, that my mother was deeply affected by the bravery of many passengers and the crew of the Titanic who, when the ship sank, gave their lives in order that women and children might be saved. Once more the intensity of her feeling, I am sure, influenced me to show concern for others in my own life.

In 1910 my father and George went west to look over the prospects of buying land. They bought a section of land jointly, after which Father returned home while George stayed on to build a shack and do some clearing. The following fall George came home, and in the spring he and my father took several box-car loads of horses, cattle and implements out to stock the new property. One incident connected with this enterprise stands out for me. Bolger, the terrier shared by George and Mer, was included in the 'stock' considered essential for the new establishment. Somehow, Bolger managed to escape, and while we were having supper he came scratching at the back door. No one confessed to knowing how he effected his escape; but I have a strong suspicion that my brother Mer was responsible!

In the summer of 1912 Mother had an attack of rheumatic fever. She was in bed from June to August. Uncle Jack, who had been spending his winters in Hawaii,

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\* sic .

decided that Mother should go with him to this warmer climate as a cure for her ailment and sent her the money for the entire trip. As well, Uncle Jack was completing a new house in Hawaii to be ready for Gretna's imminent marriage, and he wanted Mother to be there for the wedding. Despite Dr. Hamilton's concern for my mother's heart condition, Mother decided to go. She went by train to Edmonton where Uncle Jack had a private compartment for the trip to San Francisco and a private compartment on board ship. As Uncle Jack also had a heart condition he had a heart specialist with him to care for him; so Mother was placed under his care as well.\* Mother enjoyed the trip thoroughly and returned by way of Edmonton so that she could see George. She was very happy that he had met a lovely girl whom he intended to marry.

Mother arrived home on April 28, 1913 to find everything in order as Wilma had taken charge of the home in her mother's absence. On this day I went to school as usual, and when I came home I first went upstairs to wash my face and hands and to change my dress before greeting my mother. This unemotional posture was a mark of the awe and respect which I held for my mother, and it has been the way I have lived all my life.

Wilma announced her wedding to Jim Eccles for June 25; so preparations had to be made. Mrs. Kate Icam, who had a three-year-old daughter, was enlisted to help. I was intrigued to have this little companion. We played together and had tea-parties galore. One day little Elsie's brother, Leslie, and I had the bright idea of decorating her hair with a 'crown' of burrs. It looked quite lovely, but getting the burrs out was a different matter!

June 25 fell on a Wednesday, the fashionable day for weddings in 1913. The day dawned fair, but oh, so hot! The ceremony was held in the drawing-room against a background of ferns, purple iris, pink peonies and syringas. Wilma was radiant in her white satin, her veil caught with orange blossoms, and carrying a sheaf of roses. I was her flower girl and carried a basket of sweet peas in the centre of which was a little cup containing the wedding ring. My cousin remarked that I looked all hair ribbons and feet! I thought my new brother-in-law looked super. His cousin, Robert Wanless, was best man. The wedding gifts were placed in the small dining room, while the reception was held in the large dining room. My most vivid recollection is that it was so hot that the jellies melted on the serving plates, and the ice cream which surrounded an orange and pineapple mixture fell flat on the dishes.

After the wedding Mother kept Mrs. Icam on for two days a week, and this meant that I continued to have Elsie for a playmate. I dressed her up in all sorts of garb, using pins to make things fit. That was fine until one day I fitted the outfit up the back, and when poor Elsie sat down she had an unwelcome shock! Between Mrs. Icam's visits I learned to scrub the kitchen floor, first washing, then scrubbing, then rinsing a small area at a time, as Mother taught me. She also taught me to wash tea towels and underwear.

At this time my mother was often away helping Wilma to buy her furniture. It was from one of these trips that she was called home because my father had taken ill. This is how it all happened:

Food was often stored along the shelf beside the cellar stairs where it was cool. To keep the flies under control we also used Wilson's Fly Pads which were pressed paper pads treated with an insect poison and placed in a dish of water so that the flies might gather round and sip the appealing (to them) liquid. Unfortunately a saucer of this 'nectar' had been placed above a dish of pickled beets. Father loved pickled beets, but when the fork brought forth a Wilson's

\* Nora Winterflood recalls a snap-shot of Uncle Jack's garden boy holding up a gigantic centipede with the house, white frame having a veranda all around it, in the background.

Fly Pad instead of a beet, Father was sure that he had been poisoned. Mother came home and Dr. Hamilton was sent for, but he just laughed and said the vinegar in the beets would counteract the poison.

However, while there he also examined my mother and found that she had a heart condition, brought on, no doubt, from getting up too soon after her bout of rheumatic fever. She carried on as usual, but on September 30, my birthday, she became bedfast. This meant hiring a full-time housekeeper. We procured an excellent young lady named Johanna Flaherty, who, although only seventeen years of age, was able to do all the household chores as well as look after my mother, all for the sum of eight dollars a week.

By February Mother realized that she was not going to get well. So she asked my brother-in-law and Wilma, who by this time was expecting her first child, to take care of me. She remarked that her only regret was that she was leaving them with such a delicate child. On March 27 Mother suffered a stroke and died at about 5:00 P.M.

I was too young to fully realize the implications of my mother's death for the family. Fred, just turned sixteen and showing promise as a scholar, left school shortly after her death. Because Mer had always had a weight problem Mother had always taken particular pains to draw him into family gatherings, and in her absence he tended to shun general social contacts. Father missed her so much that each year he went west to visit George and his young wife, Ada. Father thought very highly of Ada who could drive a six-horse tandem on the plough as well as any man. Harry Hodgson, the English gentleman who worked for us, missed her also, for the family sing-songs led by Mother at the piano were his greatest joy and his only link with his past life in England.

For me Mother's passing meant breaking up my roots and moving to a new home. So, with my dolls and my little dog, Jerry, I said good-bye to 'home' as I had known it and went to live with Jim and Wilma. But my mother has always been with me in the legacy of habits and values which she taught me and which have been so useful to me in later years.

By this time George had added to his land by buying a half section of land from a Mr. Lagerquist.\* As this property had a fine house and barn George and Ada moved onto this land. As well, George now owned a quarter section of land formerly belonging to his father-in-law, Mr. Broad, and leased a half section of land from the Patterson family.

On my father's last return trip from the West, when the train was near Sudbury, Ontario, the conductor noticed that Father was not himself. As he knew my father quite well the conductor personally brought him out to Uncle Art's place. The doctor determined that Father had suffered a stroke, and Wilma took him to her place to recuperate. However, as there was very little to be done in those days

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\* Nora (Lyons) Winterflood recalls George and Fred going to see Mr. Lagerquist when George came east for Mer's funeral in 1936, and her impression - based on the men's conversation - was that George was closing a purchase. Murray Lyons states that his father rented this property from '34 to '36 and then bought it; and Norah (Lyons) Edwards recalls that she rode horseback to high school from this property in '37. This information indicates that the transaction belongs to a later date than Mary implies.

to reduce blood pressure Father's condition gradually deteriorated until he became bedfast. He passed away on November 22, 1930.

I think my brother Mercer was the most illustrious of our clan. For as long as I can remember he was interested in steam engines. The story is told that when anyone was threshing in the neighbourhood, Mer would skip school and go to watch the operation. So it was quite natural for him to buy his own engine and separator and set himself up as a thresher.\* He came to own two engines, two separators, a clover mill and a corn-cutting box. Later he acquired a stationary steam engine and a saw-mill which he supervised with the assistance of an on-the-job manager.

Mer was a born story-teller, and with his exceptionally retentive mind he could spin yarns and recount history in a style both colourful and humorous, but, above all, accurate.\*\* Wherever Mer went people gathered to hear his tales.

Because of his stature - 6'4" and 365 lbs. - Mer was very self-conscious about his size. This kept him from pursuing his training as a vocalist. I am sure that he could have ranked as a baritone soloist with the best of singers.\*\*\*

During the influenza epidemic of 1918 Mer was very ill. He lost one hundred pounds and had to learn to walk all over again. He was left with a heart condition from which he never fully recovered. Eventually he bought a Lanz tractor, one of the first to be imported from Germany, hoping that it would simplify threshing, but it never held for him the romance that he found in the old steam engine. On March 29, 1936, at the early age of forty-three, Mer passed away suddenly as the result of a heart attack.

My first recollection of my brother Fred was of him crying with the tooth-ache. It seemed to me he was always having to go to the dentist, and every time he had to go to Dr. Watson it was a struggle. Of course, I didn't know what pain the dentist could cause until I had to go to one myself many years later! My own problem was earache. If drops of camphorated oil or warm onion juice poured into the offending orifice did not stop my crying, Mother would say, "I'll send for Dr. Hamilton." This usually did the trick! However, as Dr. Hamilton on his frequent professional visits to the vicinity always called at our place, where dinner for both him and his horse was provided, I got it into my head that he was coming to look at me! He was a very stern looking man who always frightened me; and I must say that he left me with a fear of doctors from that time onward.

But to get back to Fred.... Fred was five and a half years older than I. He was born a twin, but his baby brother died shortly after birth. I am sure that the influence of our Mercer grandparents, whom he frequently visited, caused Fred to be the most genteel and the most considerate of all of us. Even as a young boy he looked out for me. Because of his continued conscientious care I managed to grow up without many of the mishaps which often befall those brought up without a mother.

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\* A separator was a stationary thresher, separating the grain from the chaff.

\*\* Indeed, Mer was a keen student of history - as had been his father before him - and was especially proficient in English history.

\*\*\* We are indebted to Clarence and Muriel Lyons for informing us that both Mer and George studied voice with Jean Brown, daughter of the hotel-keeper in Cheltenham, and that they both sang in Union Church choir at that time.

\*\*\*\* This tractor was a diesel.

Fred was a good athlete, playing both baseball and hockey, but his greatest sport was baseball which he pursued during the earlier part of his life. Being tall he was able to catch fly balls of incredible distances. He also enjoyed three-spot billiards. He and Andrew MacDonald played checkers, and they used to attend checker tournaments together.\* Fred was also an avid reader, and every moment not spent working was spent reading, his special interests being history, politics and philosophy.

After Father began going west annually, Fred took on much of the responsibility of the farm.\*\* But he did not settle down to farming seriously until he married Anne Hewson on April 9, 1927. They got on their feet by raising alfalfa which brought a good price at the time, and after about five years they began to build a Holstein herd and to ship milk. Anne was a wonderful help-mate for Fred, for she could turn her hand to anything. While Fred was an introvert, Anne was an extrovert and could carry on a conversation with anyone she happened to meet.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mary's memoirs were interrupted at this point by her final illness and death.

We include in her memoirs her own account written for a Saskatchewan publication marking the fiftieth anniversary celebration of that province. In July, 1980 Mary visited Weirdale, Saskatchewan where at a tea in her honour she was presented with mementos of her service to the community during her five years as Matron of Weirdale Nursing Home.

- \* Fred gave up competitive team sports shortly after marrying and settling down to farming. But his interest in checkers continued to the end of his life, although he eventually found himself left with no opponents of his calibre of expertise.
- \*\* Fred himself went west in 1915 to visit George and arrived the night that George and Ada's first child, named Frederick after him, was born. He also worked at the Goodyear Tire plant in West Toronto for a period of time.



Mary lived with her sister and brother-in-law until she was fifteen and then returned to her family home to care for her father and brothers as well as go to high school. She first attended Brampton High School, but she completed her high school in Georgetown. She then attended Toronto Normal School, and after graduation in 1924 she taught at Silver Creek Public School in Caledon and then at Ebenezer Public School (near Highways 50 and 7). As her father was by this time in very poor health she took a position at her home school at the corner of the Fifth Line and Twenty-two Sideroad.\* After her father's death in 1930 Mary took a position in a public school in Albion. Fred was by this time married, but Mary's home remained with Fred and Anne, and she and Anne became very close.

While teaching in Albion Mary began to formulate the desire to enter a new career. During a house call to Mary's ailing father the family doctor, impressed with Mary's capability in the sick-room, remarked that she should have been a nurse. This suggestion made a strong impression on her, but for some time she resisted making so radical change in her life. Then one day while washing dishes with a group of women after a function at Union Church Mary thought: "Is this all my life is to be? Washing dishes, preparing food, following a daily routine?" Her mind was made up at last.

So after eleven years of teaching Mary entered nurses' training at Guelph General Hospital, and upon graduation she obtained the prize in Obstetrics, a field which continued to be of special interest to her throughout her career. Shortly after graduation Mary was accepted by the Presbyterian Church to supervise a new nursing home which they were opening in Weirdale, Saskatchewan.\*\*

After her service in Weirdale Mary accepted the post of superintendent of Melfort General Hospital in Melfort, Saskatchewan; this was a considerably larger facility than Weirdale Nursing Home. About one year later she went on a temporary basis to Rabbit Lake (North Battleford area) in response to a plea for help. Local authorities were going to be forced to close the little hospital - about sixteen beds - if no matron could be found. She remained at Rabbit Lake for a year.

Late in 1945 she became the superintendent of Swift Current General Hospital, a much larger hospital which included a nurses' training school, but with serious problems in administration and morale. This was the kind of challenge Mary loved. Her superb organizational skills coupled with her strong instinct for social development set things to rights, and before too long Mary was again looking for new worlds to conquer.

At this time the Saskatchewan Government was planning to open an outpost hospital in Buffalo Narrows, a Metis settlement about two hundred and fifty miles north of N. Battleford, accessible at that time only by air. The Waites Fishery and Packing Plant was the only local industry. The hospital was to be owned and operated by the government; the Red Cross was to be responsible for medical supplies. Mary's application for the position of running this facility was accepted in 1946.

As she was to be the only medical personnel present she was required to complete a training course at the Maternity Center in New York City. With this training the government would, in effect, recognize her as a legally qualified midwife. Mary was in New York from September, 1946 to March 1947 during which time she was

\* Now Heritage Road and Old School Road

\*\* See the supplementary account of the Weirdale years from 1939 to 1943.

required to practise midwifery in the poor tenement districts of New York. She saw many shocking things on her rounds but had many heart-warming and often amusing experiences as well. And, of course, there were Broadway shows and one memorable evening at a black night club, under the auspices of a black colleague where the featured performer was Louis Armstrong.

In Buffalo Narrows Mary entered into the life of the community. She threw magnificent New Years' parties. She organized classes to teach the young Metis girls house-keeping and child care. She grew all the vegetables for the hospital and preserved or stored them for winter use, even growing rhubarb in barrels in the cellar! In winter she grew bulbs in pots so that there might be fresh flowers for the patients' rooms. Winter also meant making rounds by dog-team. Cases beyond her scope requiring surgery or special care were flown out to Prince Albert; so, much depended on her diagnostic skill.

Her greatest test was not in meeting the challenge to her medical skills but rather in facing the personal terrors of air travel! On her occasional trips out she had to travel on cargo planes which operated on floats in summer and skis in winter. As they were usually heavily loaded the take-offs were often disconcerting, and the subsequent flights rarely failed to confirm the expectations initiated by these alarming beginnings. However, as the pilots were experienced and capable they always made it.

Mary was taken suddenly ill and had, herself, to be flown out to Prince Albert where it was discovered that her gallbladder had ruptured. She had not been aware of a gallbladder problem, but now she underwent surgery for its removal. Her sister-in-law, Anne, went by train to Prince Albert and stayed in a hotel for the month that Mary was in hospital, going each day to the hospital to be with her. Anne then brought Mary home to Terra Cotta for a period of recovery. They arrived in Ontario in late autumn, and Mary stayed until February. She then returned to Buffalo Narrows for a few months until a replacement could be hired.

Mary then entered a new phase in her career. Recollection is dim on this point, but we believe that she spent a short time at the Victoria Union Hospital in Prince Albert in a supervisory position and then, in the fall of 1950, came east to attend the University of Toronto for one academic year in preparation for assuming the job of Director of the School of Nursing at the Regina General Hospital.

While at the Regina General Mary was approached by the Administrator of the Bayview Home for the Aged in Toronto to whom she had been recommended by the Director of the Nursing Association. Mary thought it might afford the opportunity to move closer to her family in preparation for retirement, and she accepted the new challenge with a two-fold enthusiasm. But for the first time in her life she found herself in a situation where she could not productively exercise her abilities and drive, and after a year she resigned.

Mary then worked briefly in a hospital in Chatham, Ontario, but when the opportunity to accept the post of Director of the School of Nursing at the Victoria Union Hospital in Prince Albert was presented she accepted. She spent several extremely happy and productive years in this post. During this time she was a member - and, in fact, the charter president - of the Business and Professional Women's Club in Prince Albert and was in demand as a speaker to service clubs and other community organizations.

In the 1960's Mary began to feel the need to plan for her retirement. Her strong commitment to family ties assured her that she should spend her sunset years among her family in Ontario. She had, at different times, owned two cottages in Saskatchewan. The second of these, bought after her return from the East, was on Christopher Lake, and it was her great joy to garden and entertain in this little home. Now, however, she sold her western cottage and came east where she purchased a lovely cottage on the lake in Erin. She set about having this property converted into a comfortable permanent home and returned west to complete her commitments in Saskatchewan.

Once established in Erin Mary took employment as a night supervisor in the chronic care ward at St. Joseph's Hospital in Guelph and settled into her new home and new life with her usual vigour and enthusiasm, enjoying the new freedom of reduced professional responsibilities. When St. Joseph's approached her to consider helping them to set up their proposed School of Nursing Mary declined and moved, instead, to the position of night supervisor of the infirmary at Centennial Manor senior citizens' home in Milton.

Once more she entered into community life and made many friends in Milton. So in the early 1970's she decided to sell her home in Erin and move into an apartment in Milton. She continued to nurse at Centennial Manor until she was seventy years of age, occasionally taking emergency duty at the Manor even after that time. In spite of a heart attack in September 1977 and two milder subsequent attacks she entertained as much and as elaborately as ever, and with as much joy. She travelled a good deal, her special trips being a cruise through the Caribbean and a combined cruise and land trip to Alaska and the Canadian Northwest. In Milton, as in all her previous locations, Mary was an active member of the Presbyterian Church. She later became a member of Milton Gospel Hall, and in the smaller community of this congregation Mary was blessed with caring friends who brought great joy and Christian comfort to her.

In January, 1982 Mary suffered a stroke, and although she made a remarkably good recovery she decided to give up her home and her car and move into Erin Mills Lodge, a senior citizens' residence in Clarkson. Once more Mary overcame whatever personal doubts she may have had about this move and entered into her new life with a determination to make it an active and productive experience. She joined in - and in some cases initiated - activities at the Lodge. Most importantly, she embarked on the project of writing her memoirs.

Late in November, 1982, five months after moving to Erin Mills, Mary became very ill, evidently having suffered another stroke and certainly having contracted pneumonia. Shortly after her admission on November 29 to Mississauga Hospital she slipped ever deeper into coma, and on December 21 she passed away.

She is buried in Greenwood Cemetery, Georgetown, Ontario with her brother Fred and sister-in-law Anne. On the stone which marks their graves is written:

TO LIVE IN THE HEARTS OF THOSE WE LEAVE BEHIND IS NOT TO DIE.

## WEIRDALE NURSING HOME

The plan for Weirdale Nursing Home was laid many long years before Weirdale itself existed. In the early nineteen hundreds when settlers flocked from eastern Canada and the northern United States to take up homestead land in the virgin prairies of Saskatchewan they found a land devoid of trees, a soil that was fertile, easy to till and capable of growing abundant crops for cash value, and, above all, which produced excellent grass for raising cattle and horses. The farmers felt that they had the best of everything; so they settled down to lay plans for their growing country.

Large farms, poor roads, lack of fast transportation isolated the farmers. When sickness occurred there were no hospitals closer than Regina. So as the municipalities became established energetic councillors devised a plan whereby hospital boards could be set up and through taxes raised they could erect and maintain small ten-bed hospitals in their own localities. This gave to the residents free hospitalization. The plan worked well; so it was not long before every municipality had its own hospital. In some instances two or three municipalities made an agreement to be part of a bigger municipal hospital plan.

All went well until 1925 when, due to drought and poor farming techniques, the soil began to drift. No crops were raised; cattle died of starvation. By 1930 there seemed to be no recovery of the land; so residents of the prairies had to move elsewhere. Farmers with sons could move north to the Prince Albert area where there were still homesteads to be procured. As the new C.P.R. branch line from Regina to Prince Albert had just been completed the settlers shipped their belongings by rail to P. A. Some travelled by wagon along the North Saskatchewan River trail and took up land. Others pushed farther north and east to Henribourg. From there they had to cross the country by lumber wagon over a trail that was not properly cleared. Several families took up homesteads in the fertile valley which later was named Weirdale. True, they had to build and live in log cabins with thatched roofs; they had to clear the land of trees and grub the roots before grain could be planted; but the rich virgin soil, the good supply of water and the abundance of trees to protect the soil from drifting in dry seasons made them hopeful of success in their venture northward.

Soon a small village grew up to service the rural areas. Business was brisk, and the little community of Weirdale, named after the Hon. George Weir, late Minister of Agriculture for Saskatchewan, thrived.

It was not long before the need for care of the sick was felt. Prince Albert was forty-six miles away with only one poor dirt road leading to it. Some enterprising newcomers decided that a ten-bed hospital should be built; so a local hospital board was elected to look into the possible ways of getting a hospital started. By means of volunteer labour the board had a basement dug and cemented. Then they appealed to Garden River Municipality for financial assistance, with no success. They next approached the Government of Saskatchewan to find out what aid was available, but their request was turned down. Furthermore, they learned that an act had been passed declaring that no more ten-bed hospitals were to be erected in Saskatchewan. All small health units now had to have a maximum of only nine beds and be called 'nursing homes'. As well, the government would not pay a per diem grant for patients in nursing homes.

However, at that time Mr. Wilson, a lay minister of the Presbyterian Church in Canada stationed at Meath Park, with outside charges at Howard Creek, Weirdale, Shipman and Aldershot, was aware of the need for a place to care for the sick. As he was the only one in the district with a car, he was called upon many times to



take sick persons to Prince Albert. He was aware that the Women's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church in Canada had hospitals which they had built and were maintaining; so he appealed to the Toronto Board of the W.M.S. to give consideration to assisting the people of Weirdale. Rev. R.G. McKay, moderator of the Prince Albert Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and Mrs. Williamson, President of St. Paul's W.M.S. strongly upheld Mr. Wilson's appeal."

The Toronto Board gave consideration to this new enterprise and so sought the help of Mr. Bruce, an architect connected with First Presbyterian Church in Regina. He was asked to look over the situation and estimate the cost of completing a building. He drew up plans for a nine-bed nursing home. Once the Toronto Board had approved the plans Mr. Bruce arranged with two local carpenters to begin construction.

The hospital floor was to have an office, two three-bed wards on either side of the corridor, a bathroom cupboard and a drug cupboard. Across the hall was to be the nursery, large enough to accomodate five bassinets. At the end of the corridor the plan called for a two-bed ward and across the hall a single-bed ward for isolation.

The upper floor was to be for staff quarters with a large living room, a large laundry cupboard and two bedroom.

The basement was to have a good-sized kitchen. In the corner of this kitchen was to be drilled a well which would be equipped with a hand pump which could be adapted for forcing water up to the tank in the attic, thus feeding the taps by gravity. A water front on the kitchen stove would heat water for the hot water taps. The plan also called for a nice bright dining-room for the staff and a large laundry with a huge galvanized storage tank for rain water. The dry supplies were to be kept in one room and vegetables and canned fruit, etc. in a cool corner room. The furnace was to be a large unit which took a four-foot cordwood log.

It is interesting to note how I became a part of this venture. Life is a series of adventures from beginning to end. God, the Great Creator of the Universe has a plan and purpose for each individual which He presents by opportunities to each one to serve Him. But in order to receive His offers one must be ready to listen. The first time I heard God's voice speaking to me was when I was thirteen years old. Following the death of my mother when I was nine years old I had gone to live with my sister who was married and living a lot and a half north of Mount Pleasant Church in rural Ontario. This gave me the opportunity to attend Sunday School and church on Sundays and Mission Band once a month where our leader encouraged our group to be active in missionary projects. Each Thanksgiving Sunday our group conducted the evening service in church.

It was at the 1916 service, while we were singing "Rescue the Perishing" that I experienced a warm feeling of the Holy Spirit speaking to me, and I answered by dedicating myself to work for the Lord as a missionary to Indians in Western Canada. Of course, many years of schooling, of growing up and preparing myself for adult responsibilities intervened.

The most respected profession for a young lady in the 1920's was teaching. So, after graduating from Toronto Normal School in 1924, I taught in a one-room school in Caledon Township. The twenties was the era of jazz, and dancing was a popular recreation. Sound pictures on the wide screen made movies an exciting entertainment. Almost everyone had a car for pleasure and business. It was a carefree life for young and old. As my father was ailing I took over the school near my home so that I could help to care for him, and I continued to teach there until he passed away. Free from home ties I was able to give some thought to the commitment I had



made back in 1916. I felt I could be of greater service to the Lord if I were a nurse. So in August, 1935 I entered training in Guelph General Hospital with the intention of training for outpost mission nursing. When I graduated in September, 1938 I offered my services to the Candidate Secretary of the W. M. S. as a registered nurse but stated that first I would take a course in tuberculosis at Weston Sanitarium and after that enrol for the course offered at the Deaconess Training School.

However, in January the W. M. S. informed me that they were opening a new outpost nursing home in Weirdale, Saskatchewan and asked me whether I would consider going out as superintendent of this nursing home. It was certainly a challenge, as I had not had any nursing experience on my own, let alone in charge of a complete enterprise. However, I knew that this was the project the Lord had planned for me, and the superintendent under whom I had trained, when I asked her if she felt I was capable of such an undertaking, replied: "Didn't I recommend you for the position? Then get out there and see what you can do in the situation!" I guess she gave me the boost I needed, for I accepted the position, and from then on things began to fall into place.

In March of 1939 the W.M.S. called me to a meeting to inform me that they hoped to be opening the nursing home in May. At this meeting Miss Isobel Sym, who was a registered nurse in deaconess training, was appointed to go out for deaconess duties but was to assist me in the hospital if there were too many nursing duties for me to carry alone. We were also informed that there would be one housekeeper who would be a local girl. If janitorial help was needed he was to be hired on a part-time basis. All salaries were to be paid directly from the Toronto W.M.S. Board.

In the meantime, while awaiting word to go out Mrs. McClure, National Hospital Supply Secretary, and I purchased at Eaton's in Toronto all the supplies and equipment which were forwarded to the nursing home for storage.

Much to our relief, we received word that Dr. Coleman, a new medical graduate from Winnipeg University had come to Weirdale to set up practice. He was pleased with the office the Ladies' Community Club had furnished for him, and he was most eager that it should be opened for patient care.

The W.M.S. Board was concerned at the slowness with which the building was being completed, so decided to send Miss Sym and me out to see whether we could speed the carpenters on their job. She and I were to stay at the Weirdale Hotel until the nursing home was ready for occupation. Miss Sym travelled by way of Saskatoon, and I went to Canora, Saskatchewan to get the administrative set-up. As the nursing home was not eligible for the per diem grant from the government all patients would be responsible for their full account. The cost per hospital day was set at \$2.50 with a \$10.00 deposit on admission and the balance to be paid before discharge.

Miss Sym and I met in Prince Albert and stayed with Rev. and Mrs. R.C. McKay. The next day, June 1, 1939, we boarded the branch C.P.R. line to Weirdale. This was an unforgettable experience for two Easterners. The train stopped every mile to drop off ties. Raindrops from the shower the night before glistened on every little tree and flowering shrub along the railroad. The spring crops were coming up, and the contrast of the verdure of the grain with the black loam soil assured us that we were in a truly productive country. The vast panorama of the horizon of this western land thrilled us as we reached our destination. We arrived at Weirdale at 12:00 noon and were met by Mrs. Myrtle Assleson, President

of Weirdale W.M.S. Society, Mrs. Pearl Buchanan, President of Weirdale Community Club and Mrs. Georgina Markland, Secretary of the Community Club. We were taken to the hall where a big community dinner was being served. Here we met most of the people of Weirdale, and we did, indeed, receive a royal welcome.

After unpacking our belongings at the hotel Miss Sym and I proceeded to the hospital. It surpassed our expectations of an 'outpost'. The bright cream-coloured building with white trim looked so smart, and the poplar copse north-east of it made an ideal setting. But inside, to our disappointment, we found the floors badly stained from people walking with wet shoes on the undressed floor boards. We checked the stored supplies that had been sent out from Toronto and found everything in good condition. When we got back to the hotel our heads buzzed with plans for getting the place ready for opening.

The ladies of the community<sup>offered</sup> to help. Three sewing machines were set up and the ladies came to sew gowns, bedding, curtains and baby garments from the materials sent from Toronto. Several ladies came and helped Miss Sym and me sandpaper the floors and finish them with Tremco. This done, we were able to set up the beds and equipment.

Mr. Bruce arrived from Regina and left orders with the carpenters to have the hospital building completed and ready for opening on July 1, which coincided with the big annual sports day in Weirdale.

July 1 dawned warm and sunny. Seats were set up on the hospital grounds and the opening ceremony was set for 2:00 P.M. Everything in the building shone. We ladies who had worked so hard were proud of the results. The whole countryside turned out for the ceremony.

Rev. R. McKay, Moderator of the Prince Albert Presbytery, was master of ceremonies. Mrs. Ralston, W.M.S. President for Saskatchewan and Mrs. Sinclair, Secretary came from Regina; Mrs. Louise Reath represented Toronto Board. After Rev. McKay handed over the keys of the nursing home to me the guests were escorted in groups on a tour of the building.

The Regina ladies stayed overnight and were very excited when at about 12:00 A.M. the first patient was admitted. They tiptoed down the stairs in their nighties to have a peek at a little fellow who had been severely scalded by a dish of boiling milk which he had pulled off the stove. His head, neck, back, chest and upper arms were covered with blisters. Needless to say, he was with us for over a month but healed without the necessity of skin grafting. From then on we did not lack for patients. There was an abundance of obstetrical cases - "Homesteaders' Complaint", as Mr. Jack Rowe, a local farmer, expressed it! Many of the younger people residing in Weirdale to-day were born in that little nursing home.

Being a surgeon Dr. Coleman requested an operating room. A two-bed ward was set up for this purpose, and equipment was sent out from Toronto. This room was used for a case-room and outpatient emergency room also. Our first appendectomy was the little Bulmer boy, whose appendix had ruptured. He was very ill, but Dr. Coleman, Miss Sym and I nursed him around the clock, and he recovered. In appreciation every winter Mr. Bulmer brought us sixteen of his plumpest capons.

Our first difficulty lay in financing the operation of the Nursing Home. The local board had told every one who had done volunteer work digging the basement that they would have free hospitalization. Also, because the Nursing Home was owned by the Missionary Society local residents expected that the hospital care

would be free. It was my task to see that deposits were paid, and I tried to ease the burden of paying the remainder of the account by accepting firewood - then \$2.50 a cord - in lieu of cash. Meat, fish or fowl were brought in the winter and kept frozen; any excess was canned in the spring. Milk was 7¢ a quart, eggs 10¢ a dozen, butter 20¢ a pound; meat was 20¢ a pound, whether off the neck or hind quarter. Needless to say, we lived 'high off the hog'!

Our housekeeping staff was excellent. At first we had one house-keeper, but she found the task too much and resigned. We then employed two local girls, Doris Marshall and Anne Labuik. Doris was our cook and also kept the hospital and staff quarters clean. Anne was responsible for serving meals and dishwashing, as well as keeping the basement clean. These girls worked for \$10.00 per month. Later I got their salaries raised to \$15.00 per month.

Summer was a busy season with farm accidents and infections. Tonsil clinics once a week as well as the regular patients kept us on our toes. We all worked together and, I may say, achieved the ultimate happiness of fulfilling a work that the Lord had set out for us.

September 4, 1939 loomed large in the history of the Weirdale Nursing Home. War had been declared with Germany; so Dr. Coleman went that day to enlist in the Medical Corps. He had hoped for an early call-up but remained with us until April, 1940, when he decided to set up a practice in Prince Albert so that he could get more surgical experience. After that he came out every Wednesday to the office in Weirdale. He used the hospital for out-patient services and held tonsil clinics weekly.

However, since we were without a resident doctor few patients were being admitted. Miss Sym was free to help with the Missionary Society work. Also, she assisted Miss Mabel Booth with summer camp at Lake Christopher. In addition, she organized a junior group of girls to whom she taught home nursing and also helped in the Sunday School. It seemed to me that one nurse could manage on a twenty-four hour basis; so after Miss Sym returned from her holidays she was transferred to Canora, Saskatchewan.

By November we were pleasantly surprised to have Dr. Alexander McKay take over the practice in Weirdale. He was not a surgeon; but as he was a renowned obstetrician and diagnostician our obstetrical and medical cases increased. It was good to have the hospital being used to its full capacity again.

Sometimes Smeaton Hospital was without a doctor; so they would then send their maternity cases and any seriously sick patients to us. The load became pretty heavy to carry. In September, 1943 I developed double pneumonia and had to be taken to Prince Albert's Victoria Hospital. When I recovered Dr. Robert Swaffield said that I should not stay in Saskatchewan for the winter. So I resigned so that the W.H.S. would be free to fill the position of superintendent.

Dr. McKay, the people of Weirdale, and Mrs. McNab and her daughter, Pearl, who were at this time the hospital house-keepers, anxiously waited for a nurse to come and re-open the hospital. By March no one had accepted the position; so I returned to find that Dr. McKay had moved to Smeaton as the resident doctor there. This meant that I was left on my own to carry the load of obstetrical, medical and emergency first-aid cases. It was not long before I had plenty to do, and with the co-operation of Dr. Swaffield and Dr. Setka in Prince Albert I was able to admit medical and obstetrical cases. This was a great benefit to the community as gas rationing often made it impossible to get a patient to Prince Albert.

We kept trying to get a doctor, but it was impossible as the military forces needed all that were available. The foundation of some type of pre-paid hospitalization was being advocated by some of the Saskatchewan doctors. Their plan was to set up health regions with a doctor's office and a hospital (with Public Health Care Services in it). The Toronto Board of the W.M.S. was aware of the trend in pre-paid medical care, so felt that they should not be assuming a service that the people would be able to conduct themselves. So they decided to give up their hospitals in Western Canada. The Board gave each municipality the opportunity to buy the buildings and equipment.

Because it was on the most easterly boundary of Gordon River Municipality Weirdale was unable to persuade the Municipal Council to take over the Weirdale Nursing Home. Also, by this time a good hardtop highway connected the Weirdale community with Prince Albert. As no successful negotiations could be made with Garden River Municipality the people of Weirdale were given the opportunity to buy the nursing home for \$7,000.00. However, the citizens felt that they could not maintain the enterprise and turned down the offer. Two ladies from Saskatchewan W.M.S. in Regina came up, and together we took the inventory of all supplies and equipment and stored it in the upstairs rooms. They hired a care-taker to live in the building so that they could hold it in case the people of Weirdale might find a means of taking over.

Miss Hilder Hermanson came as a Public Health nurse to see whether it could be made into a Public Health Unit, but, of course, Garden River Municipality already had Public Health Service from Prince Albert; so she left. Finally the W.M.S. decided to sell the nursing home privately, and it was purchased for use as a private home.

The Weirdale Nursing Home as it served the people in time of sickness is still remembered by the residents of Weirdale. Loving memories are still with me of the happiness which I shared with everyone serving the people of the area. Mutual friendships still continue with the people of Weirdale, and while visiting in Prince Albert in the summer of 1980 I was most happy to attend a tea at the home of Mrs. George Jones. It was very pleasant to renew old acquaintances.